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that creeps up from the soil from undermining the building. 342
The walls have few apertures, partly, again, to ensure stability, but also to protect the interior from heat and glare 342
by day, and against the cold and dangers of the night. 341
The doorway, which is about six feet high and three wide, is separated from the street by a shallow threshold. One or two tiny loopholes above eye level, measuring about twelve inches by eight, are the only other openings to the outside; and even these are stuffed up in winter.

This limitation of window space is due partly to the high price of wood. Egypt, lying in the sparsely wooded zone of tropical desert which stretches from India to the [137]
Sudan, is poorly supplied with wood. The date palms, sycamores, and acacias that give shade to the villages are too precious to be cut down for beams, and would in any case be insufficient to provide all the doors and windows that proper hygiene would necessitate. The trunks of date palms are certainly used, but very sparingly, since such trees bring their owners P.T. 100 a year in fruit, branches and fibre. Imported wood (from Finland, Sweden, Rumania and the U.S.S.R.), though commonly used in the towns, is beyond the normal means of the fellah. The result is that the doorway very often contains no door, and the loopholes are almost always without either glass or woodwork.

Though wood is dispensed with as far as possible, for the roof it is essential. In Upper Egypt, where it never rains, some houses remain roofless; but this is exceptional, and as a rule the four walls are at least covered with foliage. Ill-squared beams, set two feet apart, serve as a support for the interwoven stalks of maize, cotton, or reeds, together with palm branches. To prevent this construction from rotting, it is covered with rough mats and plastered with a thick layer of mud-and-cinder. This makes a terrace, which is proof against showers and solid enough in summer [513]
to support a roof-hut and the sleeping bodies of all the members of the household. The roof can be reached from outside by a wooden ladder or brick staircase; constant access is needed to the place where tools, grain reserves, fuel, and sometimes even poultry are kept.

The necessary habit of keeping dry brushwood and straw 372
on the roof is a frequent cause of fire, which, by reason of the 488
closeness of the houses, soon spreads to the neighbourhood 731

731 and to the whole village. A spark from oven orstove in
[372 the burning heat of summer is enough to bring disaster.
488] Village fires, by their size and frequency, constitute one of the
plagues of the Egyptian countryside. Between 1926 and 1930 sixty-six places were destroyed in this way, and every year, especially between April and September, the Public Security Department has appalling damage to report. To give an idea of its extent, here are four incidents of recent years:

1. January 14, 1936. Village of Mit Yaish, in the Markaz of Mit Ghamr. "The fire spread with terrifying speed, ending in the destruction of 94 houses. Hundreds of fellaheen are homeless."

2. April 22, 1936. El Muassaga, in the Markaz of Hehia. "The fire spread to 43 houses, which were reduced to ashes, with all the cattle, poultry and foodstuffs they contained. Losses were estimated at L.E. 300. The enquiry has proved that the fire was started by a woman of the village, named Nefissa Hassan, who was cooking in her home. A few sparks fell on the brushwood on the roof, and with the help of the wind the fire quickly spread."

3. May 5, 1937. "A terrible fire broke out in Bakanûsh, in Dessûq Markaz in the Mudiriya of Gharbiya. Five hundred houses were completely destroyed; 14 people were burnt alive, and 13 others who were rescued are suffering from severe burns."

4. January 14, 1941. "Fire broke out in the village of Deir, in the Markaz of Toukh, destroying 217 houses, causing 20 deaths, burning crops and cattle, and leaving 400 families destitute. The cause was a woman cooking on the roof."

656 There is indeed a regulation which forbids 'the storing of
731 brushwood on the flat roofs of houses', and a "Committee for Fighting Fires in the Countryside". But no regulation or committee can stop the fellah from storing his fuel on the roof, unless he is given the means of storing it elsewhere. He is similarly advised not to sleep with his cattle, but if he left them outside they would be stolen, and inside there is so little room.

353 What use does he make of the space available? If we go inside, we shall at once notice the darkness and the smell, if not the fleas. The house consists of a single room, sixteen to twenty feet by ten or twelve. "When